

A short history of Bridge Windmill: 1596-1954

There is no windmill in Bridge. A brief exploration of the village will however reveal the existence of Mill Lane, running up from the ford by Little Bridge Place to a row of eight postwar houses alongside an old bridleway at the top, named Mill Terrace, and a 1960's development in the centre of the village off Western Avenue called Windmill Close. These names are virtually all that remain to remind us of a once familiar landmark, whose site now lies beneath one of the fuel storage tanks on the corner of Mill lane and Union Road. The only building remaining associated with it is Mill Cottage in Union Road, built (it is said, about 1730, but in fact more probably 1830) sideways on to the road to give the miller a clear view of his workplace.

The first evidence for a corn mill at Bridge appears on the first detailed map of Kent issued by Philip Symondson in 1596, but it may have been in existence of course long before that. Windmills have been recorded in this country since the twelfth century. What is perhaps remarkable about Symondson's mill is that it is plainly not visible from Mill Cottage, for it is placed near the top of Side Hill, a quarter of a mile from the church, on the NE side of Bridge Hill. On a later map, in John Harris's *History of Kent* of 1719, it is similarly positioned, and represented clearly as a post mill (like Chillenden Mill), which is the oldest type of mill. It is not represented on the large-scale map (2 inches to the mile) by Andrews, Dury and Herbert of 1769, but then, nor are any other mills in Kent existing at that time. It reappears however on a map dating probably from 1825/6 in the 18<sup>th</sup> edition of *Paterson's Roads*. Here it is again placed at the top of Side Hill, on the western side of the ancient track from near Higham, which cut through the woodland and ran down into Patrixbourne, very close, indeed, to the viewpoint chosen by Jan Siberechts for his panorama of Bifrons House and Patrixbourne of 1705-10, (a viewpoint now obliterated by the by-pass). It is reasonable to suppose too that it was also adjacent to the ancient track that ran from the top of Keepers Hill in Patrixbourne all along behind the woodland above Side Hill to Bridge Hill, a track that still exists on the Patrixbourne side of the Bridge by-pass, but which was on the Bridge side stopped up in 1830. Thus it would not be wholly fanciful to imagine the painter seated within a convenient distance of the mill, and the resulting view confirms one's sense that this is indeed a better site for a windmill than that down in the valley, albeit on a small eminence, and closer to the village. The Black Mill at Barham was after all quite some distance from that village.

The position of Bridge Mill prior to about 1820 is confirmed by the documentary evidence, which also introduces us to some of the millers. The *Kentish Gazette* of 26-30 May 1786 reported that

On Saturday last was committed to St Dunstan's gaol. . . John Kent, of this city, miller, charged on the oath of John Pilcher, of Bridge, miller and baker, with having stolen out of his mill in the Parish of Patrixbourne, a bag, containing upwards of one hundred weight of wheaten flour. . .

Our first known miller is revealed. Mr Pilcher was not a young man in 1786, and could well have begun his work forty or more years before that, for the *Gazette* shortly afterwards (13-17 April 1787) carried a small advertisement:

Wanted, a man who understands the business of a MILLER and BAKER. . . He may have constant work and good wages by applying to John Pilcher, at Bridge.

Eighteen months later Mr Pilcher was dead.

Wednesday last died in Bridger's Alms Houses, in this city, Mrs Pilcher, aged 94, mother of the late Mr Pilcher, miller, of Bridge. (*Gazette*, 2-5 September 1788)

On 10-14 October of the same year an advertisement was placed, offering for sale furniture 'of the late Mr John Pilcher, Baker, at Bridge.' Does this suggest he had already given up as miller? And perhaps the *Gazette* gives a clue as to the identity of the man who applied for work in 1786:

Tuesday was married at Boxley . . . Mr George Cleggett, miller and baker at Bridge, to Miss Frances Parks, at Boxley (8 July 1791).

Mr Cleggett's business was evidently prosperous:

WANTED. An apprentice to a miller and Baker - a stout healthy lad, of a creditable family. Apply to George Cleggett, Bridge (12 August 1791).

With more hands available, Mr Cleggett was able to expand:

Cleggett, miller and baker, Bridge, takes this opportunity of returning his most grateful acknowledgements to the neighbouring gentry and inhabitants of Bridge for the many past favours received in the above branches: at the same time begs leave to inform them, he has just opened a corn-chandler's shop, and hopes by the strictest attention to every article of his business, he shall be able to merit their future as well as past favours. Beans, Peas and Barley, to be sold ready-ground. N.B. Gentlemen who keep dogs may be supplied with oatmeal, in any quantity, on the most reasonable terms.

(8 October 1791)

Shortly after this (26 October 1791) we find a further advertisement for 'a sober miller', presumably because of the expansion of business, rather than because his apprentice had been too stout or healthy in his indulgence.

By the early years of the following century the mill had been taken over by John Fagg, who in the *Gazette* of 18 July 1808 was in his turn advertising for 'a journeyman wind-miller'. Later that same year we find explicit reference to the location of the mill:

MILL ROBBERED, Whereas in the night of Wednesday last, the 30<sup>th</sup> November, the Mill belonging to John Fagg, on Bridge Hill, was broke open by forcing the hinges of the door, apparently with an iron crow or chisel, and a Quantity of flour with TWO SACKS marked 'J.Fagg, Bridge Mill' were stolen thereout and traced for about half a mile across the fields, leading towards Canterbury by Patricxbourne. Whoever can give information so that the offender or offenders may be convicted, shall receive a reward of TWENTY POUNDS from the aforesaid John Fagg (2 December 1808).

Such a substantial reward underlines both the value of flour, and the vulnerability of mills.

The final chapter in the history of this mill is tantalisingly recorded by the *Gazette* of 7 July 1818:

To be sold. . . a CORN WINDMILL, driving two pair of stones, and machinery complete and a storehouse near. . . both in good repair, as the same are standing . . . on a piece of land at Bridge Hill . . . now in the occupation of Mr John Fagg, miller. The said corn windmill and storehouse must be taken down and removed by the purchaser, on or before the sixth April next . . .

The reason for the strict deadline is unclear, and as has been mentioned above, the 1826 map still marks the old location, so the mill may not have been removed so swiftly; alternatively, the change may not yet have been picked up. The sequence of events in the 1820's remains mysterious. The period around 1820-1830 was however one of great alteration in the village as a whole. The great houses round about were changing hands. The Taylors who had owned Bifrons (and much else besides) sold the house to Lord Conyngham in January 1830. Edward Taylor the younger had married the heiress of Bourne, Louisa Beckingham, in 1802, and after her father's death sold that property too to Lord Conyngham. Charles de Secondat, Baron Montesquieu, who had been living at Oswalds in Bishopsbourne since his escape from the French Revolution and who had bought Bridge Hill House (originally owned by the Rev. John Beckingham) for £1500 in 1793, died there in 1824. The property was then taken by the Rev. Edward Gregory, who immediately entered upon major improvements, including the stopping-up of the road mentioned earlier. This most conveniently coincided with the realignment of Bridge Hill north-eastwards and the grading of its slope under the Turnpike Acts, which was taking place in 1829-30, along with a similar treatment of Town Hill on the Canterbury side of the village (hence the very steep slope at the entrance to Dering Road). A few years earlier, in 1816/17, the principal road from Bridge to Patricxbourne, which ran right past the front of Bifrons, was stopped up part way along (Laundry Lane, now Conyngham Lane), and a new road built (Bekesbourne Road) around the perimeter of Edward Taylor's land. Pressure of traffic was being noticed even at this early date.

In the midst of this, on 19-20 January 1830, at the same time as Bifrons was sold, an agreement was drawn up between Edward Lord Skelmersdale, Sir Herbert Taylor (by now Lieutenant General) and Edward Taylor, late of Bifrons on one side, and James Ashenden, farmer and William Sankey, surgeon of Bridge on the other, for the sale to Ashenden for £200 of

All that piece of land called or known by the name of the Three Corner Meadow containing 2 acres, 2 roods 7 perches formerly in tenure of Henry Cosoer, afterwards of Charles Howard, late of said James Ashenden and then of Joseph Gardener and William Fagg the younger . . . abutting to a bridle way leading from the village of Bridge to a place called Linsey Bottom towards the north, to the highway or road leading from the village of Bridge to a place called Street End towards the west or south-west, and to lands formerly of the heirs of Mr Forde and then belonging to the Rev Barham [RH Barham, *alias* Thomas Ingoldsby, 1788-1845, who at the time owned Bridge Farm in the High Street, demolished in 1962] towards the south-east, which said piece was theretofore used with and formed part of a farm called the Upper Pett Farm late in occupation of Richard Garner deceased, and was theretofore described as all that . . . in occupation of Henry Crosoer . . . And also all that corn windmill and other the buildings then lately erected and built on said land by and at the whole costs and expense of said James Ashenden [though in a later document, of 21 August 1878, Thomas Ashenden is said to have been the builder]. (East Kent Archive Centre ref. U438 T27)

By 1830 therefore a mill existed, though it had only lately been built, on the site in the village. Was this the same mill that had been demolished elsewhere a few years earlier? Both had two pairs of stones, but this was a smock mill, albeit quite a small one. The mill on Bridge Hill was, by the time of its demolition, unlikely still to have been the post-mill of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Nor was wholesale removal of a mill impossible, although the terrain between Bridge Hill and Three Corner Meadow was difficult:

Many . . . Kentish mills were moved . . . from one part of a village to another or into an adjoining parish, often to take advantage of the prevailing south-westerly winds from a more exposed position. . . . Often, to remove a mill, the octagonal body was divided up into eight sections by sawing down the eight cant (corner) posts; then, in re-erection, these sections would be bolted together again. One of the original cant posts bolted together in this way can still be seen in Ripple Mill. . . . Frequently, however, the body of the mill was conveyed intact, and one can imagine that difficulties sometimes arose in the conveyance of such a huge structure. . . . (W.Coles Finch, p.63)

The day after James Ashenden bought the site from the Taylors, he turned a tidy profit by leasing the mill and land to Ann and Sarah Garner for 500 years at a price of £400 (plus ten shillings to Dr Sankey). Ann Garner died on 8 March 1831 however, and the land was passed to Charles Edward Howard, a veterinary surgeon. Ashenden died in September 1832, and the following year Sarah Garner sold out to Thomas Sladden, who, having bought out Ashenden's children in turn sold the mill to Thomas and Benjamin Johnson (2 March 1832) for £650 - a profit of £250 therefore. Curiously, according to the 1841 census, Thomas Johnson is recorded as residing at 45 Union Street (in Bridge? - the Old Mill House today is number 41, but that includes many modern houses). Thomas ran the mill until his death in 1856. His long tenure, of some 24 years evidently left a mark on the village, for he was still remembered nearly a century later:

Local history has it that the figure of the dusty miller was a familiar sight in the village, for his practice was to deliver flour to his customers personally, his method of transport being the back of a donkey. One presumes, of course, that he loaded the donkey with his sacks of flour and he himself led the animal through the village. (*Folkestone Herald*, 25 March 1933)

When Johnson died the mill seems to have been worked for a while by Gilbert Huxster, but in 1859 the miller was George Fryer, who was Benjamin Johnson's executor and brother-in-law. Fryer kept the mill running for a further twenty years or so, while Benjamin seems to have been in charge of Barton Mill in Canterbury.

In 1865 Benjamin Johnson died (11 March), and a couple of years later his widow, Mary Ann, took out a mortgage from one George Adams (?a cooper) for £500, presumably to buy back Fryer's interest, yet in 1874 Fryer also paid Adams £500 to recover ownership. After Mary Ann's death in 1875 (15 March) however ownership of the whole property was conveyed (January 1877) to the Johnson children Susanna, Martha Francis, Ellen Eliza, Emily and John Gilbert, with Fryer remaining as tenant, In the following year (21 August 1878) the Johnsons sold the whole property to the Rt. Hon Arthur Baron Wrottesley (Baron Wrottesley, Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire) and Theodore Henry Brinckman, Bart. for the princely sum of £1000. The property had once more reverted to aristocratic ownership!

At this point the 24 year old John Gilbert Johnson was prospering, for he was the employer of four men at Barton Mill, and of a maid at home, where his eldest sister Susanna now ran the household (Wrottesley and Brinckman on the other hand employed 32 servants between them).

On 10 April 1879 the 65 year old Fryer gave up his tenancy of the mill, which was valued then at just £98 10s 10d - notably including a sack chain 50 feet long and two iron pinions to the stones - and retired with his wife Mary Ann (a daughter of Thomas Johnson) a few yards down the hill to number 5 Union Road. Some months later (October 1880) John Johnson transferred the tenancy to William White, who in his turn moved into the Mill House with his wife Rebecca and thirteen year old daughter Emily. William had been born in 1829, and was therefore by now well into middle age. The fact that his daughter was born in Bridge suggests that Mr White had already been working at Bridge Mill for some years. At this point the mill was judged to be worth no more than £65 9s 6d, including the 'lifts etc. for sweeps . . . and three old sails'. The reference to (canvas) sails suggests that the mill at this time was fitted with 'common sweeps'. Later photographs suggest that these were subsequently modernised as 'patent sweeps', with automatic adjustment of the shutters, depending on wind speed.

By the last decade of the century industrial milling was offering stiff competition to the old trade, and Mr White endeavoured to upgrade the mill with the addition of a steam-engine to assist the wind. This was however no more than a short-term solution, and when the mill was taken over by William Manwaring in 1900 he endeavoured to improve productivity further by installing a Blackstone oil engine in an outside store to run an additional pair of stones. The inevitable could not be put off for much longer though, and in 1907 wind-power was abandoned. A long period of slow decay set in as first the sweeps were removed and then the body of the mill demoted to serve merely as a general storehouse. The mill probably ceased work grinding corn by whatever means sometime during or just after the first world war. Mr Manwaring moved on to become the owner of one of the last remaining working windmills in the country (before their recent revival as a 'heritage' industry) at Willesborough. The last journeyman ever to have worked at Bridge Mill was remembered (in 1954) as one A. Pegden.

By 1933 when the Lemar family replaced Mr and Mrs Charlie Hollands in the Mill House the mill site was being used as a coal yard, an outlying depot of HE Burniston, a Canterbury coal merchant, and Mr GF Lemar was employed to expand the local coal trade. His daughter Gladys still (2000) resides at 41 Union Road, the Mill House, though the coal yard in its turn has been replaced by the storage tanks of Messrs Corralls liquid fuel depot. The one remaining relic of the mill itself is a millstone in the front porch of the Mill House.

Early in 1933 the remains of the mill were described by the correspondent of *The Folkestone Herald*:

The tower of Bridge Mill is covered with tarred sheeting. It therefore has a sombre aspect and is not as picturesque as some of our old derelicts. It is, in fact, rather a sorry spectacle, with two sweeps missing and only the midlings remaining of the other two. The stage . . . has vanished entirely, and the fantail has also disappeared. The body of the mill, however, is fairly sound, and there are two floors of brickwork beneath the weather-boarded structure. (25 March 1933)

Mr J Holman, reporting the state of affairs in June of the same year, relates:

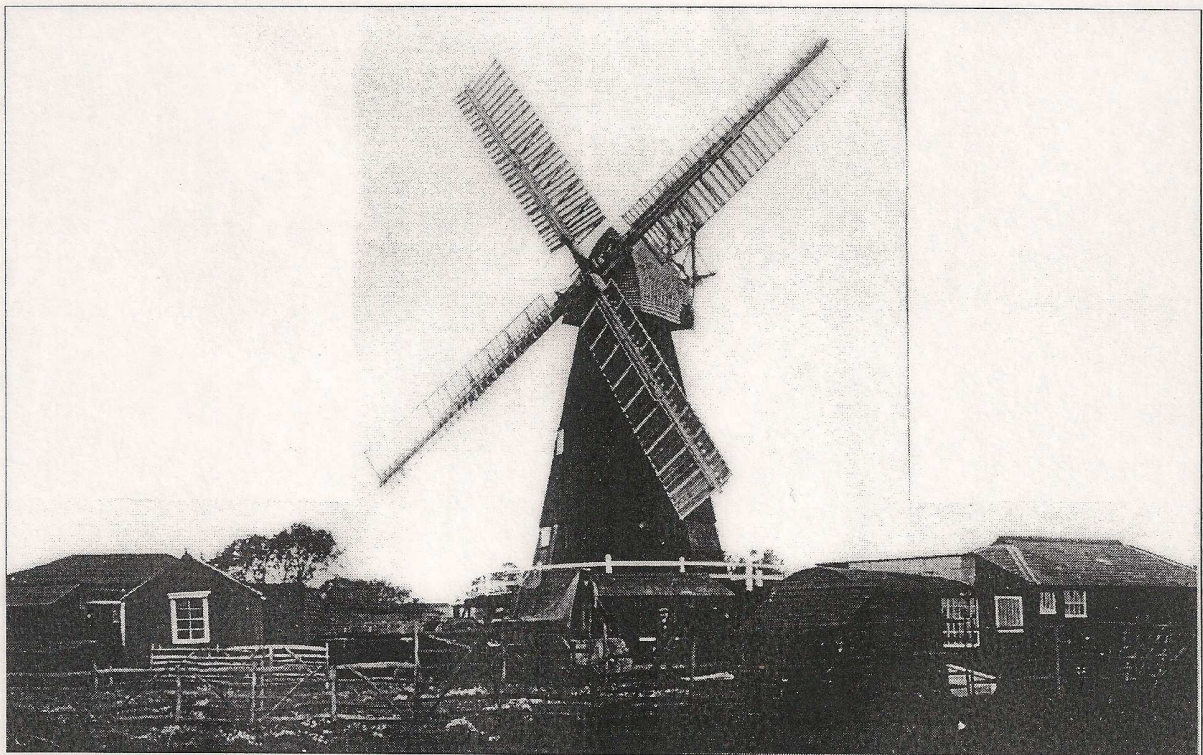
The midling has been cut off at the end of the cheek pieces, the cap reboarded and creosoted. The back of the cap has been cut off short and boarded up, while the tower has also been repaired. Although the cap looks a bit strange, I am glad that repairs have been carried out since the mill was getting into a bad state. I believe it is now used as a store. (W Coles Finch, p. 313)

The mill survived, decaying gradually, through the second world war and beyond, until at last the end came, witnessed by the late Mr CP Davies. On Friday 15 October 1954 four men arrived to commence demolition. By midday on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> they had, with the aid of a crane, reduced the mill to its unusually tall, two-storey tapering brick base - tall perhaps to compensate for its relatively low-lying position.

There remained on the site at the time of my visit the cast iron windshaft 11'4" long, canisters 9" by 1'2½", tapering from top to centre thus >. Brake wheel wooden, clasp armed, wood geared, cant 1'2" deep, cogs 3" pitch, 3 5/8" face. Brake - wood; curb - wood; iron truck wheels. Upright shaft - in two parts; upper part iron, carrying iron wallower, with wood ring to drive sack hoist. Wallower had four arms, cogs 3" pitch, 4" face. Lower part, upright shaft wooden, octagonal in section, spur wheel wooden, clasp armed, 1½" pitch, 3" face. (CP Davies, MS notes)

The major part of the mill gear was thus still in place and well-preserved. Even the body might have been saved if it had survived another 15 years or so. But an age which allowed the destruction of Bridge Farm had no time for an old windmill.

MM Raraty  
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The mill in working condition before 1910 © Crown Copyright. NMR

IX: THE ESTABLISHMENT AND EARLY ADMINISTRATION OF THE  
NEW POOR LAW IN THE BRIDGE UNION

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THE NEW POOR LAW

Any study of the New Poor Law must first encompass a description of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which laid down the principles governing the treatment of the poor for the rest of the nineteenth century. Prior to 1834 there was no national system of poor relief. Instead different parts of the country administered different kinds of workhouse or provided various payments of cash or kind, which supplemented the low incomes of the poor. The most famous type of outdoor relief was the 'Speenhamland System'. As pauperism and outdoor relief increased so too did poor rates. It was alleged that the Speenhamland payments encouraged laziness and were a positive disincentive to work. For these reasons it was thought advisable to devise a new and national system of poor relief.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 abolished outdoor relief to the able-bodied, who on applying for relief were to be offered maintenance in a workhouse where their lives would be regulated and made less comfortable than had they chosen to stay outside and fend for themselves (1). This principle of 'less eligibility' had the attraction of being a self-acting test of destitution. Only those persons who were genuinely in dire need would accept the workhouse rather than starvation, particularly since on entering the workhouse they lost all the rights and privileges they were entitled to in the outside world. Those who were not in such straits would prefer to remain independent and thus avoid contracting the morally wasting disease of pauperism (2).

The New Poor Law was seen as a positive solution to an increasing problem of pauperism, which would work wonders for the moral character of the working man, and reduce poor rates, since it would be cheaper to administer than the old systems of outdoor relief. For these reasons the Government accepted the principles of the New Poor Law even though they involved a greater degree of bureaucratic centralisation than would have been acceptable to them under normal circumstances. Under the 1834 act overall responsibility for the poor law passed into the hands of three Poor Law Commissioners at Somerset House, whose rulings were transmitted to Boards of Guardians in different areas by Assistant Poor Law Commissioners. The country was divided up into Poor Law Unions, for each of which a Board of Guardians was appointed with complete control of local administration. Each Poor Law Union was composed of several parishes. Boards varied in terms of administrative detail and in how they interpreted the legislation of 1834. Some stuck to the letter of the Poor Law Amendment Act, while others proved to be more flexible. Boards of Guardians were elected annually and each Guardian represented a constituent Parish within his Poor Law Union.

The implementation of the New Poor Law was not as uniform as its promoters had hoped for. For a few years several Boards of Guardians in Northern Counties merely administered the Registration Act of 1836 (3), and even when they were persuaded to assume responsibility for the poor law in place of the parish authorities they were allowed to continue the payment of outdoor relief to the able-bodied. Having permitted such a concession, the central authority experienced difficulty in withdrawing it. Moreover the workhouse test was never enforced in the industrialised Unions of

Lancashire and the West Riding and Boards of Guardians even ignored the stipulation that able-bodied male applicants for relief be subjected to some form of task work. They demanded instead that their Guardians be given full discretion to relieve their poor as they thought fit, so that outdoor relief to the able-bodied continued, and even took the form of allowances in aid of inadequate earnings (4). Initially the central body lacked the power to enforce anyone to do anything, and yet much was achieved prior to the first great administrative change of 1847, whereby a new Poor Law Board replaced the three Poor Law Commissioners as a governing and ministerial rather than a reforming authority (5).

For thirteen years between 1834 and 1847 the three Poor Law Commissioners, with Edwin Chadwick as their secretary, administered the early years of the New Poor Law, but under constant pressure from Parliament and from hostile agitation in the industrial areas they failed to achieve national uniformity in poor law administration or the abolition of outdoor relief. During the 1840's they both formally permitted a considerable degree of outdoor relief, even to the able-bodied, and relaxed their supervision of local administration. Chadwick, after a number of quarrels, increasingly turned his attention to the sanitary problems raised by his report of 1842, and from 1847 was no longer involved in poor law administration. 1847 also produced a major scandal surrounding the Andover Workhouse, where paupers who had been so badly fed on being set to work on grinding bones for fertiliser fought for any scraps of food which still clung to the half-rotten bones (6). This case exposed a slackening of control from the centre and promoted a parliamentary storm out of which the Poor Law Board emerged as a minor government department. Under a new Act, which was passed at the same time, an inspectorate was established and some improvements in workhouse conditions were promised (7).

Inadequate levels of outdoor and indoor relief have been blamed on the meanness of Boards of Guardians who, it is alleged, cared more for the rates than the poor under their control. Given a failure to reform the rating system in 1834, some of this parsimony is understandable. Prior to 1865 each parish remained responsible for the cost of relieving its own paupers, and until 1861 the contribution of each parish to the common expenses of the Union was assessed on the basis of its relief expenditure and not its rateable value; in other words, on its poverty rather than its property. Parishes with large working class populations experienced great difficulties in collecting poor rates in periods of trade depression, and so were unable to meet the financial demands imposed upon them by their Boards of Guardians, who, in turn found their financial resources dwindling at times when calls upon them were at their greatest. Under the Union Chargeability Act of 1865 the entire cost of poor relief was placed on the Union, rather than on the parish, thereby redressing an unequal burden between rich and poor parishes within the same Union (8).

The Bridge Poor Law Union in comparison with more extreme examples was a model union. While it did not adhere strictly to the principles of the Poor Law Amendment Act, it was certainly more co-operative than many unions in the North of England.

#### THE MINUTE BOOKS OF THE BRIDGE GUARDIANS

The main historical source for this chapter exists in the minute books of the Board of Guardians of the Bridge Poor Law Union, of which there are twenty-one spanning the years from 1835 to 1930. They can be consulted in the County Archives Office in Maidstone. Entered in these books were the

weekly meetings, decisions and reports of the Bridge Board of Guardians. The books themselves are very large measuring approximately eighteen inches in length and ten inches in width. One single volume can contain entries for three years. They are all beautifully written in fine copperplate hand-writing.

The procedure at each meeting followed the normal pattern of any committee meeting, commencing with a list of those Guardians who were present. Normally the Guardians turned their attention firstly to the weekly financial accounts, as submitted by the two Receiving Officers of the Bridge Union, which usually showed how much had been paid in Out Relief over the previous week. Items discussed thereafter varied from one meeting to another, but might include the acceptance or rejection of tenders from local tradesmen, who competed with each other in supplying provisions and other necessities to the Workhouse; petitions for out-relief from paupers who resided in the Union; and matters of daily routine in the running of the Workhouse, such as new appointments, salaries, the diets of inmates and new pauper admissions. Queries on any point of administration were sent to the Poor Law Commissioners.

The minute books provide a clear and lengthy account of the day to day running of the Bridge Poor Law Union. They also yield much valuable and useful information in such areas as the quarterly cost of poor relief, or the cost of poor relief for individual parishes. Unfortunately, however, there are gaps in this sort of information, which therefore cannot be followed through on a year by year basis. With respect to Bridge itself the Minute books portray the parish and village as one part of the Poor Law Union. Intermittently figures appear which show Bridge's share of the poor rate, or the numbers of paupers from this particular parish who were receiving outdoor relief or staying in the Workhouse.

Despite gaps in information, lack of consistency and problems of interpreting other people's handwriting, those minute books which have been consulted have proved to be an interesting and informative source.

#### THE BRIDGE POOR LAW UNION AND THE FIRST MEETING OF THE GUARDIANS

The first meeting of the Bridge Union Board of Guardians was held on 22 April 1835, "by order and by declaration of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales dated 27 March, 1835" (9). It was held at the White Horse Inn in Bridge. The Guardians were joined by Sir Francis Head, as Assistant Poor Law Commissioner for the East Kent Area, and by the following Ex Officio-Guardians: the Rev. C. Hughes-Hallett, George Gipps Esq., and Robert Ballard-Johnstone Esq. There were nineteen Parish Guardians: (10)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Parish</u>
Richard Brice	Bridge
John Bushell	Ickham
Henry Collard	Patricxbourne
John Sankey	Lower Hardres
John Marsh Hood	Kingston
Stephen Fuller	Harbledown
Stephen Gambill	Waltham
John Howard	Upper Hardres
John Harvey	Bishopsbourne
Nathaniel Maynard	Fordwich



<u>Name</u>	<u>Parish</u>
Thomas Byng	Wickham
Thomas Sladden	Adisham
Edward Collard	Stodmarsh
Richard Peckham	Bekesbourne
Denne Denne	Littlebourne
Henry Mount	Nackington
Robert Lathe	Thanington
Benjamin Harrison	Womenswold
Robert Owann	Westgate.

There were two guardians who were absent and they represented Barham and Petham. Thus the Bridge Poor Law Union was established on the basis of twenty-one parishes. The first meeting was largely concerned with settling the administration of the Union. Richard Peckham of Bekesbourne was elected Chairman and Nathaniel Maynard of Fordwich was elected Deputy Chairman. It was resolved that meetings should be held every Thursday morning at eleven o'clock at the White Horse Inn in Bridge. Herbert Collard was elected Clerk of the Union at a salary, to be recommended to the Poor Law Commissioners, of £40 per annum.

The Union was divided into two districts, each of which had one Receiving Officer. Captain Samuel Beachcroft, who was a half pay Officer of the 14th Regiment, was recommended as the Receiving Officer for the first district at a salary of £50 per annum which had also to be recommended to the Poor Law Commissioners. Henry Illsby was appointed Receiving Officer for the 2nd District. The twenty one parishes were apportioned to the two districts as follows:

<u>1st District</u>	<u>2nd District</u>
Bridge	Nackington
Womenswold	Upper Hardres
Barham	Lower Hardres
Kingston	Petham
Patricxbourne	Waltham
Bishopsbourne	Thanington
Adisham	Harbledown
Bekesbourne	Westgate
Littlebourne	Fordwich
Ickham	
Wickham	
Stodmarsh	

Four districts were created for purposes of medical assistance:

<u>1st District</u>	<u>2nd District</u>	<u>3rd District</u>	<u>4th District</u>
Bridge	Adisham	Nackington	Harbledown
Womenswold	Bekesbourne	Upper Hardres	Fordwich
Barham	Littlebourne	Petham	Thanington
Kingston	Ickham	Lower Hardres	Westgate
Bishopsbourne	Wickham	Waltham	
Patricxbourne	Stodmarsh		

The subject of a Workhouse was also discussed at the first meeting. It was agreed, subject to the approval of the Poor Law Commissioners, to provide accommodation for no more than 500 able-bodied paupers. A committee was established to find a suitable site for the Workhouse,

composed of Mr. Brice (representing Bridge), Mr. Maynard, Mr. Lathe, Mr. Peckham, and Mr. Denne.

Administrative arrangements were finalised at subsequent meetings, Mr. D. Denne was appointed Treasurer to the Union and Richard Pilcher was appointed Auditor (11). £150 per annum was offered to the local doctor for caring for the sick poor. In July 1835 the Guardians accepted Sir Francis Head's request that the Parish of Chartham should join the Bridge Poor Law Union, which was thereby extended to twenty-two parishes, surrounding Canterbury as shown by the parallel lines on the attached map, which has been taken from G. H. Garrad, A Survey of the Agriculture of Kent (1954).

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF THE WORKHOUSE: THE BUILDING.

The Bridge Union Board of Guardians, who resolved almost immediately to build a workhouse, set up a committee to find a suitable site within one mile of Bridge which contained an acre of ground (12). The site selected adjoined the turnpike road from Bridge to Canterbury. The necessary land, which belonged to the Marchioness of Coringham (13), was bought for £237. 10s. from Lord Albert Conyngham (14). Having located and purchased a site, the Guardians through the medium of the Canterbury newspapers invited builders to tender for constructing the Workhouse. A surveyor was appointed and the tender of Mr. T. F. Cozens, a Canterbury builder, was accepted for £4,376 (15). The construction of a Union Workhouse at Bridge was financed by a £5,000 loan from the Exchequer (16).

#### STAFF APPOINTMENTS

Within nine months of accepting Mr. Cozens's tender the Workhouse was ready to admit its first inmates by February 1836. Already a Master for the Workhouse had been appointed. An advertisement which appeared in the newspapers during August 1835 offered a salary of £80 per annum (17). Applicants whose names were short-listed were interviewed at the White Horse, together with their wives (18). John Weeks and his wife were appointed as the first Master and Matron of the Bridge Union Workhouse at a salary of £80 per annum, exclusive of rent, candles and living (19). Mr. and Mrs. Weeks resigned their appointments towards the end of December 1835 (20) before the workhouse officially opened, thereby forcing the Guardians to find a new Master and Matron. Early in 1836 Thomas and Maria Cobb were appointed Master and Matron of the Bridge Union Workhouse at annual salaries of respectively £80 and £20 (21).

A schoolmistress was appointed at a salary of £32 per annum, while John Adams as the first porter received wages of 10/- a week (22). Spiritual needs were provided by a Workhouse Chaplain (23), while a medical officer was paid £50 per annum to attend on the sick in the Workhouse.

By the time the Workhouse opened its doors the following domestic staff had been engaged (24).

Laurance, Sarah, aged 35	-	Cook
Morgan, Mary, aged 32	-	Cook
Breasley, Mary, aged 37	-	Cook
Brice, Sarah, aged 48	-	Nurse for Wards No. 7 to No. 15
Spain, Mrs., aged 29	-	To give her attendance to the Boys.
Holness, Ann, aged 23	-	To give her attendance to the Girls.

Thus the Workhouse began its life with a minimum staff of twelve persons, eight of whom were women, and over half of whom were domestic staff.

### THE INMATES

The Workhouse as constructed initially was intended to house 200 inmates, though it contained fewer than that number in its early stages. To start with only one hundred iron bedsteads were required. Inmates arrived from already established Workhouses, such as the Littlebourne Poorhouse (25). On 25 February 1836 the Bridge Guardians decided to seek authority to sell the Littlebourne Workhouse (26), which was the same Thursday when paupers from Barham and Bishopsbourne in Elham Workhouse moved into the Bridge Workhouse (27).

### THE LAYOUT OF THE WORKHOUSE (28)

Probationary and waiting wards were situated below and next to the Committee Room. The Workhouse on its south and north sides contained upper and lower wards, viz:

#### On the South Side of the Workhouse:

Upper Wards	}	To No. 7 inclusive = Girls under 16 years of age.
		To No. 15 inclusive = Old Women and Bedridden Women.
Lower Wards	}	To No. 22 inclusive = Boys under 13 years of age.
		To No. 30 inclusive = Able-bodied Women.

#### On the North Side of the Workhouse:

Upper Wards - Old Men.

Lower Wards - Able-bodied men and boys 13 years of age and above.

Permission had to be sought from the Poor Law Commissioners for two old couples to sleep together (29) but this was strictly against the rules of the Poor Law Commission until after 1847 when some concessions were made.

The Guardians' minute books contain few figures relating to numbers of paupers in the Workhouse, but during the first quarter of 1847 there were nineteen paupers from Bridge itself in the Workhouse, whose maintenance cost £27. 8s. 9d. (30). During the same three months fifteen paupers in Bridge had received outdoor relief at a total cost of £16. 17s. 7d. In comparison with the other parishes in the Union Bridge was about average. Chartham, on the other hand, was well above average, having had twenty-eight paupers in the Workhouse during the same period at a total cost of £45. 12s. 6d. In the granting to outdoor relief Chartham was much above average with ninety-seven paupers receiving outdoor relief at a total cost of £58. 15s. 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d.

### THE INMATES' DIET

At a meeting which was held in 1835, involving all the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the East Kent Unions under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Head, it was agreed to adopt one common diet for all Union Workhouses and Poorhouses throughout East Kent (31):

For the Able-Bodied: Men and Women

Breakfast and Supper. Bread and cheese or butter - 6 oz. of bread for men, 5 oz. for women with 1 oz. of cheese of  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. of butter.

Dinner. Two days - Suet Puddings and vegetables - 1 lb. of pudding for men, 10 oz. for women. One day - Meat pudding with vegetables - 1 lb. of pudding for men and 10 oz. for women. Four days - Bread and Cheese - 7 oz. of bread and 1 oz. of cheese.

For Old People

The same as for the able-bodied plus 1 oz. of tea and milk for breakfast and supper.

For Children

Bread and milk for breakfast and supper and such proportions of the dinner diet for the able-bodied as the Board of Guardians shall decide.

For the Sick

Whatever be ordered for them by the Medical Officer.

Dietary alterations which were made subsequently included giving male inmates who worked hard a daily pint of beer, while the breakfast diet was changed from bread and cheese to gruel.

EXPENDITURE INCURRED BY THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS AND HOW THEY EXTENDED THEIR FUNCTIONS

It was immediately agreed by the Board of Guardians that the various parishes making up the Bridge Union had to meet the running costs of the union, in "such proportion of the general expenses of the union as is lawfully chargeable to the said parishes" (32). Bridge had to pay £27, as against Barham paying the most at £53 and S odmarsh the least at only £6. Since the average was £22, Bridge paid something over the average.

The Guardians also quickly agreed on the following scales of weekly outdoor relief:

	<u>Amount without earnings</u>
For a married man and wife	5/-
For each child	1/-
For single men	2/6d.

At the 1835 July meeting of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Sir Francis Head expressed the following views on the payment of out-relief (33):

"any fixed scale of relief is directly hostile to the principle of the Poor Law Amendment Act. No pauper should be able to safely calculate the amount of relief he should receive and thus set store by it. Instead it should

fluctuate so much that he could never calculate what he was to receive and therefore come to realise he had no certain support - nothing on which he could safely rely - but his own industry and his own providence".

It was agreed that the eleven unions of East Kent should act as uniformly as possible. Outdoor relief was fixed at sums beyond which it was not to be extended under any circumstances:

	<u>Amount per week</u>
For a man, wife and six children	10/-
For a man and wife	5/-

Outdoor relief was made still less attractive when it was decided that the maximum payment to old people should be 2/6d. per week.

Sir Francis Head further ruled that parishes within the Bridge Union had to allocate five per cent of their average yearly poor law expenditure towards the administrative costs of the Union, for which purpose a report was compiled showing the annual average expenditure on poor relief by each parish over the previous three years after deducting expenses for emigration (34):

	£
Adisham	288
Barham	660
Bekesbourne	122
Bishopsbourne	365
Bridge	175
Chartham	884
Fordwich	109
Upper Hardres	258
Lower Hardres	261
Ickham	594
Kingston	180
Littlebourne	528
Harbledown	496
Nackington	302
Petham	483
Patricxbourne	259
Stodmarsh	120
Thanington	404
Waltham	731
Westgate	458
Wickham	714
Womenswold	101
	<hr/>
<u>Total</u>	<u>8,492</u>

Bridge's share of administrative costs was £8. 15s. Compared with several other parishes, Bridge's poor law expenditure had been very low.

Due to the establishment of the Workhouse there was a higher expenditure on poor relief during the first quarter of 1836 (35):

1. Total cost of in-relief in the first quarter of ...  
... £275. 15s. 3d.

2. Total cost of out-relief in the first quarter of ...  
 ... £763. 19s. 0 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.

Plus 3 Establishment charges of ...  
 ... £1,459. 11s. 3d.

Had these costs continued at this level for the whole year, then total poor relief expenditure would have exceeded £10,000, which would have been more than the £8,492 average of the previous three years. The three items of expenditure as far as Bridge was concerned were:

1. In-relief of £21. 7s. 10d.
2. Out-relief of £21. 11s. 5d.
3. Establishment of £30. 1s. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.

Had these costs also continued then the total cost of poor relief in Bridge would have exceeded £200 for 1836. Initially higher costs were involved in implementing the 1834 Poor Law Act with the result that poor law expenditure increased considerably during the first year following the establishment of the New Poor Law in Bridge. Such high levels of expenditure, however, did not continue. By 1847 the total cost for the first quarter for Bridge was at a much lower level and was calculated as follows:

1. In-relief of £27. 8s. 9d.
2. Out-relief of £16. 17s. 7d.
3. Establishment of £5. 2s. 1d.

Lower outdoor relief and establishment costs existed alongside a higher expenditure involved in maintaining those paupers who had entered the Workhouse. These trends were repeated for other parishes within the Bridge Union.

The Guardians maintained a tight control over expenditure. Anything supplied to the Workhouse was subject to competitive tenders. The Receiving Officers in reporting weekly to the Board stated how much money had been spent on outdoor relief. Usually this amounted to about £45, except on those occasions when they had to pay for the treatment of lunatics, as on 9 April, 1840, when a weekly expenditure of £72. 7s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. was reported. The corresponding expenditures for the previous week ending on 2 April were £41. 6s. 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., and for the following week ending on 16 April, £41. 6s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

Initially the Guardians experienced difficulties in collecting the parochial poor rates. In 1836 several parishes refused to acknowledge and pay the Guardians' appointed Collector (36). After continuous trouble throughout that year the Board set up a committee, consisting of five of its members who were to examine and report on the best method of collecting the Parish rates within the Bridge Union (37). Richard Brice from Bridge was elected to this committee. The Guardians in addition requested the Poor Law authorities to send an explanatory letter to the troublesome parishes concerning the collector's right to the Parish Rate (38). Subsequently on 27 February 1840 the Board of Guardians allowed Parish Officers to excuse paupers from paying the Poor Rate (39).

Another financial problem which the Guardians had to face in 1840 arose out of disagreements over the payment of Medical Officers. They sought information from the other Poor Law Unions in East Kent as to whether

and how much they paid their Medical Officers (40). The Guardians were facing criticism from Mr. Nix who had been a Medical Officer to the Union since its formation. In 1840 he was continually complaining of underpayment, but was finally satisfied in 1841 with a salary of £50 a year for attending the workhouse, plus 12/- for each attendance on the outdoor poor and 14/- for each midwifery case (41).

As time progressed, so Boards of Guardians' functions were extended and their financial affairs became more complicated. In 1847 Bridge Union became responsible for collecting those county rates which were due from within its boundaries and had also to pay the county clerk of the peace whatever sums were owing for judicial administration throughout its area (42). In 1847 a cheque for £168. 0s. 10d. was paid over to Mr. Mercer, the County Treasurer, as the amount of county rate due from the parishes within the Union. Bridge's share of this was £9. 19s. 7d., but Chartham had most to pay at £19. 5s. 11d. (43).

The Guardians had many demands on their purse other than normal poor relief payments. Occasionally they authorised grants to families to enable them to emigrate, as on 27 February 1840, when "the sanction of the Board was given to the Parish Officers of Upper Hardres to advance the sum of £5 to Thomas Hobb's wife and child of that parish for the purpose of their emigrating to Australia" (44). Later in that year on 11th September the sum of £14. 11s. 3d. was granted to Thomas Fairways and his family of Chartham for their emigration to New Zealand (45).

Payments were sometimes made to other Unions for having incurred expenditure on a Bridge Union pauper. Whenever such requests were received the Bridge Guardians usually paid promptly, as on 1 December 1836 "to the Faversham Union for the upkeep, for twenty-six weeks, of a child belonging to the Parish of Barham" (46).

Extensions of functions in other directions can also be seen in the Guardians' minutes. From 1836 onwards they were responsible for the registration of births, marriages and deaths. They apprenticed boys to employers outside the area, so that a Canterbury sweep, for instance, was allowed to have apprentice boys in 1840 (47). On 11 September 1840 they agreed to vaccinate all the children who required vaccination within the Bridge Union (48).

There was a wide range to the matters discussed and decisions taken by the Bridge Board of Guardians. This overall conclusion can be supported from their minute books during the 1840's. On 5 March 1840 the Clerk to the Board of Guardians was requested to write to the Poor Law Commissioners to find out the correct procedure "towards Pregnant Unmarried Women requesting to lye-in in the Workhouse", and also whether such women who appeared on a second occasion should be punished (49). At the same time it was also decided that all bastards, over seven years of age, who applied for relief, would be ordered into the Workhouse.

The Union Chaplain reported to the Board of Guardians on 14 March 1842 that the internal discipline of inmates was generally satisfactory, and that there had been particular progress in the education of the Workhouse children (50). On 29 April 1847 the Guardians considered moving a lunatic from Upper Hardres to the County Asylum at Barming Heath, near Maidstone (51).

CONCLUSION

Even from this brief study of the early years of the administration of the Bridge Poor Law Union, it is possible to advance several conclusions. The Guardians were very conscientious in executing their duties. They were not particularly hard or unkind in their administration of poor relief, yet this is a charge which is commonly thrown at Victorian Boards of Guardians. Although they were careful over financial matters, they were not always tight-fisted and did help those in genuine need. Costs of poor relief were not always reduced at least in the short-term. Despite condemnation of outdoor relief such payments to the able-bodied poor continued within the Bridge Union, alongside other types of out-relief such as funeral expenses, clothing grants and medical aid. Within the Bridge Union the parish of Bridge appears as a village having but a small number of paupers and an average poor-relief expenditure.



FOOTNOTES

- (1) M. E. Rose, The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914 (1972), 8.
- (2) Ibid., 8.
- (3) Ibid., 11.
- (4) Ibid., 11.
- (5) M. Bruce, The Coming of the Welfare State (1961), 103.
- (6) I. Anstruther, The Scandal of the Andover Workhouse (1973), 133.
- (7) Bruce, op. cit., 117.
- (8) Rose, op. cit., 42.
- (9) Minutes of Bridge Board of Guardians, 22 April 1835.
- (10) Ibid., 22 April 1835.
- (11) Ibid., 28 April 1835.
- (12) Ibid., 28 April 1835.
- (13) Ibid., 7th May 1835.
- (14) Ibid., 6 August 1835.
- (15) Ibid., 27 May 1835.
- (16) Ibid., 25 February 1836.
- (17) Ibid., 20 August 1835.
- (18) Ibid., 10 September 1835.
- (19) Ibid., 17 September 1835.
- (20) Ibid., 27 December 1835.
- (21) Ibid., 7 January 1836.
- (22) Ibid., 28 January 1836.
- (23) Ibid., 17 November 1836.
- (24) Ibid., 10 December 1836.
- (25) Ibid., 28 January 1836.
- (26) Ibid., 25 February 1836.
- (27) Ibid., 18 February 1836.
- (28) Ibid., 10 December 1836.
- (29) Ibid., 11 February 1836.
- (30) Ibid., 1 April 1847.
- (31) Ibid., 9 July 1835.
- (32) Ibid., 21 May 1835.
- (33) Ibid., 9 July 1835.
- (34) Ibid., 21 November 1835.
- (35) Ibid., 25 February 1836.
- (36) Ibid., 14 July 1836.
- (37) Ibid., 3 November 1836.
- (38) Ibid., 3 November 1836.
- (39) Ibid., 27 February 1840.
- (40) Ibid., 27 February 1840.
- (41) Ibid., 5 March 1841.
- (42) Ibid., 12 March 1847.
- (43) Ibid., 9 April 1847.
- (44) Ibid., 27 February 1840.
- (45) Ibid., 11 September 1840.
- (46) Ibid., 1 December 1836.
- (47) Ibid., 2 January 1840.
- (48) Ibid., 11 September 1840.
- (49) Ibid., 5 March 1840.
- (50) Ibid., 14 March 1842.
- (51) Ibid., 29 April 1847.